

Quadrantid Meteor Shower, Wednesday, January 4, early A. M.

Got up at 2:30 A.M. and went out to observe the Quadrantid meteor shower, the first meteor shower of 2012. Coldest night/day of the winter, so far: about 6 degrees Fahrenheit when I went out.

The Quadrantids are often the most intense of the year's regular meteor showers, but also one of the shortest. They happen when Earth passes through the narrow trail of debris left by an asteroid called 2003 EH1, so they only last a few hours. Other showers, such as the Perseids in August, are caused by the more widespread debris from comets, so they may last several nights. The gibbous moon set at about 3 A.M. From then until dawn, the sky was very dark and perfect for watching meteors.

I was out in the middle of No. 10 Fairway—and then on No. 1 tee—for about 45 minutes and saw four meteorites, one somewhat like the one shown in the photo below; the other three, somewhat shorter/smaller.



Repeatedly, I had the impression that I was seeing shimmering waves of millions/billions of sand-like particles move very rapidly across the sky—in one or two seconds, the waves crossed the entire arc of the sky, from horizon to horizon. Those grains of sand, plunging into our atmosphere at speeds of up to 90,000 m.p.h., were all very tiny meteorites, all burning to a quick and spectacular death, about 50 miles up.

The Quadrantids are a northern-hemisphere phenomenon, and because of the timing -- the shower peaking as the moon sets -- the best sighting area was the eastern U.S.

I am very glad I got up for the Quadrantids. I had to dress completely before going outside, because the temperature was about 6 degrees Fahrenheit. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to watch such phenomena.

While outside in the middle of the freezing-cold night, I also started up/warmed up my Silverado Chevrolet. Happily, it started after two or three turns of the key. Also, while up and about in the middle of the night, I re-loaded the woodburner in the kitchen. When I returned to bed, I fell back to sleep almost immediately.

Here is an article on the Quadrantid meteor shower in 2011, as

STARGAZING DEPT.
SHOWER



The city breasted the Quadrantid meteor shower recently, Queens first. On a fortuitously clear night, in the far reaches of the borough, beyond where the Q-16 bus makes its turnaround, on the grounds of old Fort Totten, atop a small hill that once held a mortar battery, two urban park rangers and twenty-five or so shivering visitors scoped the sky. The Quadrantid meteor shower occurs every year between December 28th and January 7th, and when the Quadrantids are at their peak they can produce a hundred meteors—"shooting stars"—per hour. The shower appears to come at the planet from under the handle of the Big Dipper. As one, the watchers turned to the north-northeast, where the Dipper was supposed to be, and waited for a celestial dazzling.

Trees were in the way, though. Someone's smartphone showed where everything was up there, with the Dipper climbing slowly above the horizon. But, for the moment, that had to be taken on faith, and when the constellation rose higher its chances against the metro glare in that low part of the sky did not look good. "Wait! Wait," a voice cried. "I see a meteor! . . . No, it's just an airplane." Planes were crossing the sky all over, like ants on a ceiling. Their lights blinked left, right, thorax, left, right, thorax. People agreed that it would be darker, and the viewing better, in half an hour. Meanwhile, Ranger Eric Handy gave an impromptu lecture, his blue-white face beneath the broad brim of his ranger's hat popping into startled visibility when those with flash cameras took pictures of him.

Ranger Eric said that a meteoroid is an object whose size ranges from as small as a couple of molecules to about three feet across, moving through space; that a meteor is the light given off by such an object when it encounters the friction of the atmosphere; and that a meteorite is one of those objects when it somehow lands on Earth.

A voice asked if all meteor showers were the result of the Earth's passing through debris in the trails of comets.

Eric said, "Most are, but scientists think the Quadrantid shower comes from the remnants of an asteroid that broke apart about five hundred years ago. Ancient Chinese, Japanese, and Korean astronomers may have observed this asteroid. It has been given the number 196256."

Another voice asked why, if meteor showers are named for the constellation in which they seem to originate (the Perseid shower, the Orionid shower), this one was called the Quadrantid, since there's no constellation with that name.

"There isn't now, but there was," Eric answered. "Below the Big Dipper"—Ursa Major—"there used to be a constellation called the Mural Quadrant, for its resemblance to the astronomical device. It was named in 1795, and declared no longer a constellation in 1922. Its stars have been reassigned to other constellations."

The night grew colder. The watchers hugged themselves and shifted from foot to foot, and attention wandered. Off to the left, white lights on the cables of the Throgs Neck Bridge swooped Bronxward. On top of the bridge's two towers,

seen in Queens, NY

red lights flashed in random sequence, jarringly. The Quadrantids' peak hour arrived, but still no meteors; not even the Dipper could be seen. In a different part of the sky, about forty degrees above the horizon, Jupiter sparkled, plain as anything. The other ranger, Marc Sanchez, turned the telescope around and aimed at it. The planet, with four of its moons, shimmied in the eyepiece, which was as chilly to the skin as space itself. A voice remarked, "When you bump it like that, you move the telescope about a million miles."

Later, and darker; no meteors. People drifted down the hill to their cars to warm up. Children strayed: "Ryan, stay here!" "Can't I step on the ice? It feels weird on my feet." Ranger Eric said, "Well, at least we showed you where the Quadrantids are in the sky, so now you can find them for yourselves." Ranger Marc said, "You would definitely be able to see them better if you were someplace darker, like upstate." Ranger Eric: "And we really got lucky with the weather this year! Last year, it was cloudy." Ranger Marc: "Actually, I grew up in the city, and I've only seen one meteor here in my entire life. It was last year, on the Throgs Neck Bridge. I almost got in an accident."

—*Ian Frazier*

01-04-2012-1 2012 PA. Farm Show :
I learned today that the Farm Show
will pay for 2 nights' lodging as well
as my round-trip bus fare to
Harrisburg -- plus all meals, taxis,
and auto mileage from Home to
bus terminal. In addition, I will
get paid to judge the poultry
show. At DWP's suggestion, I
made Trailways Bus inquiries a
couple of days ago & was very
pleased to learn that there
are two busses daily each way --
Scranton - Harrisburg. My plan
at present is to depart from
Scranton at 4:05 P.M. on Friday,
and to depart from Harrisburg
at noon on Sunday. The birds &
Bossy Bull will be fine / OK
during my absence. I can

1/4/12 - 2 feed them appropriately on
Friday & they will be fine when
I get back on Sunday. Mer-
cifully, the weather will be
rather mild during my two
days out of town, so all will
be well here. Everything
at home must be in order
by 2 P.M. on Friday, when I
will head to Scranton for the
bus. I am so relieved at
not having to drive to
Harrisburg & back. I will
luxuriate in the bus trip -
no driving concerns at all.
at Harrisburg, I will take
taxis as necessary & that

01/04/12 - 3 Will be a great luxury.
Saturday morning I will have
to get up early -- judging
begins at 8 or 9 Am. Sunday
morning I will get up when
I feel like it and take a
taxi to the noon bus for
Scranton. Not having to drive
to Harrisburg is a great luxury.
I will leave my truck at
the bus station in Scranton
and that will make things
very easy.

I continue to wrap in
bundles all of journals and
poetry papers -- all of
which have been microfilmed.
↑ on a daily basis

01-04-12-4 Having all those papers wrapped up in packets will not only prevent the pages from getting mixed up but also will protect them. Hopefully, these papers will be around for some time -- and in the order & condition that I want to see them in. If they manage to survive long enough following my death, someone may well decide that they are not only interesting but also worth holding on to. It's all a grand lottery, when all is said and done.